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Teggs Edition.

VANCENZA

— or the —

DANGERS of CREDULITY.

by M<sup>rs</sup> Robinson.

Part. 2<sup>nd</sup>

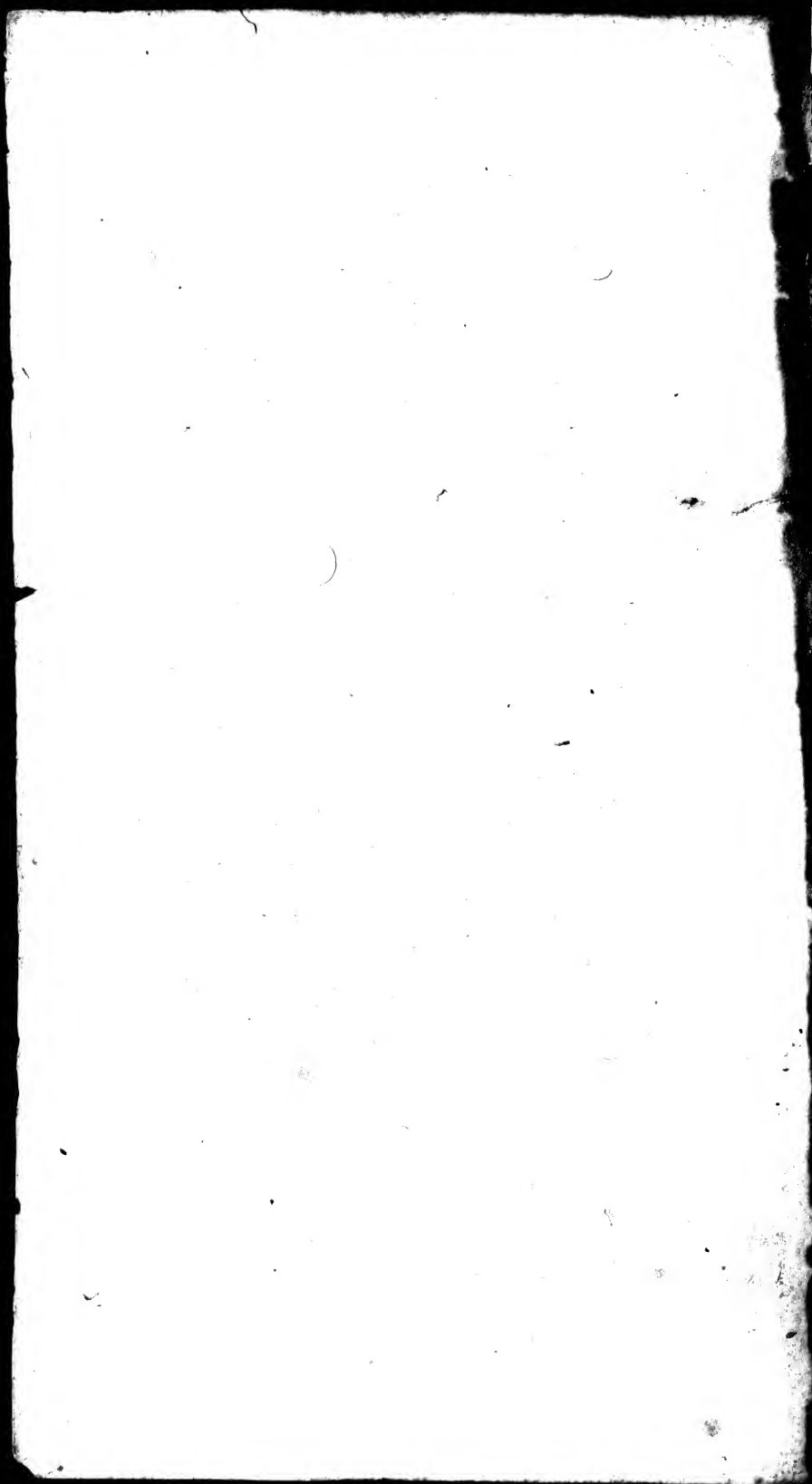


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1810

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## THE DANGERS OF CREDULITY.

## PART II.

**W**INTER was now far advanced; the bleak winds swept the bare summit of the precipice; the veil of foliage, torn from nature's variegated bosom, was scattered by the blast, and the deep vale presented to the solitary moralist, a desolated blank of universal whiteness; every shallow rivulet, that had meandered over its pebbly channel, was bound in icy fetters, its wanderings arrested, and its lucid current congealed in melancholy silence. The feathered choir, no longer attuning their downy throats to strains of melody, sat moping on the leafless branches, or pecking the wild berries, spared by the ravages of unpropitious skies, as the scanty pittance of nature's little commoners, and here and there, upon the snow-encrusted earth, a plummy victim found a spotless grave!

The last tribute of affection being paid to the remains of the departed Count Vancenza, the lovely and disconsolate mourners prepared for their journey to the forest.

The Duke del Vero flattered himself, that, by the death of the Count, he should have a complete triumph over the beautiful and unfriended orphan. He only waited till decency permitted them to receive visits of condolence, for the commencement of his attacks. He wrote a letter by way of passport, to the Marchioness de Vallorie, wherein he lamented, in the most pathetic language, the loss they had sustained, at the same time requesting her permission to pay his personal respects. The Marchioness, who firmly believed that the Duke was seriously and honourably attached to Elvira, looked forward, with the most pleasing hope of her forming a splendid and permanent alliance.

The Prince Almanza, whose sincere affection for Elvira was awakened by the tender touch of sympathetic pity, endeavoured repeatedly to gain admittance into the abode of anguish; his visits were daily returned by written acknowledgements, and, at the expiration of three weeks, they departed, taking a final leave of Madrid and all its fatal haunts of destructive dissipation.

They measured back the same route which they had pursued in the journey to Madrid; but how changed, how melancholy, did every object appear. The first day's journey presented nothing but a dreary waste of desolated nature

They arrived on the evening of the first day at a small and miserable post-house, six leagues from Madrid: the shades of night approaching, they deemed it imprudent and unsafe to venture across the mountains which terminated Old Castile, rather choosing to take up their abode in an inconvenient hovel, than risk the dangers of losing themselves in the snow, or perishing by the inclemency of the season.

A gloomy silence prevailed during the day; in vain did the eye of memory endeavour to retrace the embowering shades of myrtle, the avenues of citron and pomegranate, the sun-burnt swains, and merry lasses dancing before the splendid cavalcade.

At length they reached the humble asylum, where the weary traveller finds a shelter, and the voluptuary a lesson of humility: The coarse and simple fare the season afforded, was spread before them: but they had fed on sorrow till the heart sickened!

The faint dawn cast her grey mantle over the dreary prospect, when they commenced their second day's journey. By noon they reached the foot of a stupendous mountain, over which they were obliged to pass; the weary mules began to mount the toilsome ascent, every moment endangering the lives of the travellers, by falling on the rugged pathway. By painful and repeated exertions, they arrived at a small hovel, about half way up the mountain, where an old shepherd presented them dried fruits, and wine of the poorest quality. They readily partook of his coarse fare, and, after gratefully requiting him, proceeded.

After surmounting innumerable impediments, they reached the summit, and stopping their mules to rest, they observed a venerable man—"clad in a pilgrim's weed." His staff supported his weary limbs, and his scrip seemed scantily supplied with bread and water. His countenance was the picture of meek sufferance; his white hair hung like threads of silver upon his stooping shoulders, except when the rude blast compelled it to shade his wrinkled cheek. His hat was worn and tattered; the scallop shell placed in the front, as the badge of penitential humility. He resembled the withered oak, majestic even in ruin!

He was shortly overtaken by the the travellers; they ordered their domestics to stop the mules, and, in the language the feeling heart never fails to dictate to the tongue, when it addresses the unhappy they politely requested to be informed, whether they could be of service to him, or render the progress of his journey less irksome by society. "My servant," said said the Marchioness, "can seat himself behind the carriage, during the remainder of this post, perhaps his mule will be of use to you." "Madam," replied the venerable man, I am bound to bless you for your generous attention; but, alas! I

cannot profit by your kindness : the humiliation of penitential misery does not aspire to taste the balm of comfort ; I am grown familiar with affliction, and should scarcely be able to endure a cessation of my sorrows : I have no friend to lament my absence, no kindred to mourn my disgrace ; the warm passions of earlier days are settled in the frost of age ; penury has long since denied the comforts of life, and eternal penitence alone can expiate its errors." Here he turned aside, to wipe the involuntary tear, rung from his bursting heart by the hard grasp of unrelenting conscience, then requesting their pardon for having detained them so long, poured out his soul in fervent benedictions, and rested on his staff : they passed, and soon lost sight of him by the winding of the road.

Elvira's speaking eye paid the tribute of sensibility to the pilgrim's artless narrative. "Is it possible," said she, "that a single crime should harbour its dark purpose in a mind that appears so exquisitely enlightened? Can a countenance so marked with complacency and candour, prove the specious mask to cover the base designing heart!—Impossible?—I wish I could learn the story, and participate the sufferings of this poor old man; age, assailed by poverty, and toiling towards the grave, requires the hand of kind commiseration to pluck the thorns that choke its dreary path-way!—Let us ~~endeavour~~ <sup>endeavour</sup> to lighten the burthen of affliction by the gentle offices of humanity?"

The Marchioness instantly suggested the idea of inviting the pilgrim to rest at Vancenza. "There," said she, "perhaps he will unlock the secrets of his heart; but I absolutely forbid that any means should be adopted to draw from his wrung bosom a confession that may wound his feelings." They promised to observe the strictest delicacy, and in hopes of his arrival, stopped at the bottom of the mountain.

He soon came up with them ; the Marchioness whose mind wanted little preparation for the exercise of gentleness and pity, informed the pilgrim, that if his route lay towards the Forest of Vancenza, he would confer a pleasure on them by sojourning a few days at the castle.—He thanked them, and promised to accept their hospitable invitation; though his stay, he said, must be circumscribed to a few hours only.

It was midnight when they arrived at Vancenza ; the old porter opened the ponderous gate, that closed the outward walls, in sullen silence. At the inner door the steward, in the deepest mourning, greeted their return, with a profound sigh. The ancient apartments appeared cold and deary, stripped, of every attraction. The table was prepared for supper; but *he*, whose engaging conversation once enlivened every repast was there no longer.

Elvira's heart throbbled with agony; she trembled lest her eye should meet the Marchioness's; Caroline hid her face upon her folded arms on the corner of the table, and an awful silence prevailed throughout the apartment.

After the servants had waited for some minutes in dumb affliction, the Marchioness informed them they might withdraw. Elvira drew her chair towards the fire; her companions followed her. Every breast was bursting with anguish; every eye suffused with tears.

The Marchioness broke the melancholy silence:—

"We are now, my lovely girls" said she, "deprived of our only comfort, our only protector. I need not picture to you the dangers and calamities to which our sex are exposed, or the extreme caution necessary to be observed by young persons entering into the tempestuous scenes of transitory life. The various examples you have witnessed of the depravity of human nature, during your residence at Madrid, must be indelibly imprinted on your minds. The sordid duplicity of one sex, and the disgusting insignificance of the other, form a strikingly contrasted portrait, wherein you may trace the lineaments of half mankind. The virtuous retirement in which you were educated, under the careful inspection of my lamented brother, almost taught you to believe that perfection belonged to the human heart—Experience has convinced you of the contrary.

"The mind of man, is a mixture of incomprehensible propensities—virtue is often its natural inmate; but, there is scarcely an instance wherein either vanity, avarice, ambition, inordinate passions, or frivolous pursuits, do not in some degree, contaminate its purity, and tarnish its most brilliant attributes.

"In youth the warmth of a vigorous imagination leads the giddy mortal through the flowery paths of prodigality, till dissipation plunges him in a gulph of hopeless misery. In vain does the sinking victim, struggling in the whirlpool of destruction, supplicate the commiserating hand of friendship, to snatch him from the torrent that overwhelms him; he that falls from his own imprudence, falls unpitied; for age forgets the errors of its earliest years, and avarice deadens the soul to every exquisite sensation of philanthropy. The miser sinking under the gripe of misery, craving for *that*, which in fact he possesses, without knowing how to enjoy, shivers in voluntary anguish over masses of treasure, and possessing the means of every gratification, pines out an irksome existence in poverty and sorrow, till he sinks into the grave, abhorred and unlamented! The pretended philosopher pompously instructs the afflicted with his specious theory, and affects to condemn the repining spirit that meets the frowns of fortune

with an unwelcome eye. Let the hand of Heaven deprive him of its smallest blessing, he sinks beneath the stroke, and becomes the victim of despair! The atheist, wantonly profane, revelling in the plenitude of health, and basking in the sunny splendours of prosperity, laughs to scorn the devout enthusiast; behold him on the bed of death shook by convulsive agonies; he renounces his former temerity, and his last sigh, is an appeal to his Creator!

“Let the eye of reason take an accurate survey of the general pursuits of mankind, and their pernicious tendencies. The father, whole years scraping together the means of gratifying the short-lived prodigality of the son; the fond mother, adorning the darling of her heart with all the graces of education, and embellishing her form with every tasteful and becoming appendage—perhaps—to fascinate the eye of some artful seducer, whose spells shall tarnish her fair fame, and send her beauties to an untimely sepulchre. The lover, ardently pursuing the coquette that abhors him, while the fond bosom that throbs with affection, is suffered to languish in obscurity, deserted and forgotten.

“Little and contracted minds are apt to envy the possessors of exalted titles and empty distinctions; the parade of ostentatious pride, and the lavish distribution of ill-bestowed riches, cannot fail to provoke the indignation of discerning and unprejudiced minds. Wealth, profusely squandered in selfish and unworthy gratifications, serve only as the degraded means of blazoning the depravity of its possessors, while the heart, generously participates the scanty pittance of fortune with the unhappy; that calls forth the buds of genius, frost-nipped by the biting blasts of poverty; that shelters modest merit from the taunts of overbearing ignorance; presents a sublime picture of that perfection, which exalts mankind to the likeness of *divinity*.

“The poorest peasant, fatigued with the exertions of laborious exercise, enjoys the balmy influence of sleep upon the rushy pallet of honest indigence; while the downy couch sustains the pampered frame, a prey to feverish inquietude: thus the hind may smile contemptuously on the boasted superiority of his lord; and, in the full enjoyment of repose and health, look down with pity on the imbecility of mind and body, the wretched associate of luxury and indolence. So capricious are the fluctuations of fortune, and so uncertain the decrees of fate, that we scarcely know what may be termed *real* happiness. The insolent triumphs of vice over virtue; the misfortunes frequently pursuing the efforts of honest industry, while profusion overflows the lap of infamy, ought to convince us, that some undefinable cause actuates every principle of the grand system by which the soul is

governed; and that some beneficial end is the object of those unaccountable events, which we presume to repine at, and to mis-name the injustice of Heaven.

"If reflection takes a flattering retrospect of the empty round of fancied pleasures you sometimes participated at Madrid; and if the present prospect of retirement should appear irksome by the delusive comparison, let reason whisper, that if you are not revelling in the lively scenes of brilliant splendour, you are at least secure from dangers, and exempt from the miseries of public life. With this consolatory idea, I trust you will submit, without repining, to the sober comforts of seclusion, and forget the tinsel blandishments of fashionable folly."

Elvira, whose opinions exactly corresponded with those of the Marchioness, readily acknowledged the truth and propriety of her admonitions. Carline made no reply; and the excellent preceptress, after a short pause resumed her discourse.

"As we have still some months to remain under this beloved roof, there will be time sufficient to arrange our plans of future conduct with prudence and circumspection. I am still mistress of a small villa in the vicinity of Naples; it was the favoured retreat of my most honoured husband; the delight he enjoyed in forming and embellishing the sweet Elysium, prevented my ever parting with it. Here, at least, my beloved companions, we may hope for uninterrupted tranquillity."

Deeply impressed with this edifying conversation, the young pupils retired to rest; and the amiable Marchioness to her accustomed devotions.

Elvira soon quitted her pillow, and wandering through the gothic apartments of the castle, explored every corner, and tried every lock, in hopes of discovering that, which might receive the last gift of her guardian. In vain did she search, in vain endeavour to find any clue to the perplexing mystery. A thousand hopes and fears by turns assailed her bosom; ingenuity could not devise any probable means of developing the secret attached to the legacy bequeathed with such tender emotion, and curiosity would not suffer her to rest satisfied in her present state of uncertainty: the whole day was dedicated to useless endeavours, except a few moments of sympathetic sorrow over the crystal tablet, whose mournful lines were imprinted upon her heart. That some sad history was enveloped in the oblivious shroud of time, there remained not a single doubt; and her prophetic soul informed her, that *she* alone must unveil the fatal secret.

The arrival of the Pilgrim put an end to that day's search. The steward had conducted him to his apartment, whither the Marchioness and her pupils instantly repaired to bid him wel-



some. A variety of refreshments were placed before him, but he declined the proffered luxuries. The scanty nourishment his scrip afforded, being nearly exhausted, he replenished it with thanks, and drawing a wicker chair to the corner of the spacious hearth, blessed Heaven—and smiled contented! “Are you going much farther?” said Carline; the Marchioness shook her head as a mark of disapprobation. “Yes, fair lady,” replied the Pilgrim, “I am going to pay my devotions at the Chapel of the Loretto.”—Carline’s curiosity, arrested by her mother’s frown, waited impatiently for further information.

“If my melancholy story,” resumed he, “could either instruct or amuse you, I would gladly recite it; but, alas! uninterrupted woe will only awaken your pity, without repaying your lost time.” Elvira assured him, that to alleviate his grief would be to them the proudest gratification; and that if sympathy could administer comfort to the wounds of misfortune, he might depend upon receiving some degree of consolation in communicating his calamities.

“Sweet ladies,” said the venerable man, “I shall tire your patience: but if it is your wish to hear a tale of sorrow, I feel, that gratitude and respect demand it of me. The Marchioness would readily have excused him, but her inclinations were over-ruled by Carline and Elvira, who seating themselves on each side of the Pilgrim, with anxious curiosity awaited the recital.

#### THE PILGRIM’S STORY.

“My eyes first opened to the vicissitudes of life, in the city of Avignon. My father was a general in the French service; and, my mother, the only offspring of her noble, but indigent, parents. They were united by disinterested affection, and as their happiness centered in each other, they were above the envy or the malice of mankind. My father’s fortune, though not competent to procure the luxuries of the world, was, by my mother’s œconomy and exemplary prudence, sufficient for the enjoyment of every comfort. I was the only fruit of their unsullied attachment. My amiable mother only survived a few minutes after she gave me being. She embraced me, and clasping me to her bosom, resigned her gentle soul to endless happiness. My father, whose profession called him from Avignon when I was scarcely three years old, committed the care of my education to the Abbe de Versac, a distant relation of my mother. He was a man celebrated for his profound erudition and brilliant talents: he instructed my young mind in all the acquirements of a scholar, and a gentleman. The labours of his anxious hours were repaid by my close attention to the precepts he wished to inculcate. At the age of

seventeen I had acquired a competent knowledge of the classics, and had already composed many successful pieces in imitation of the Greek and Latin poets. The rocks of Vaucluse consecrated by the inspiration of the Muses, had often echoed with my matin song, and the celestial form of the immortal Laura, frequently blessed in visionary dreams the slumbers of the evening! I felt rapt, inspired, as I traversed the deep valley, or mused beneath the laurel'd bower, dedicated to love and virtue! I wandered on the margin of the shallow rivulets that were once dear to the faithful Petrarch, their murmurs soothed my pensive heart; and, as I dropped a tear upon their bubbling surface, I felt the conscious delight of having paid the tender tribute due to his memory and his sorrows! Often did I cast my listless form upon the sod, made sacred by the foot-steps of the wandering lovers. These were my happy moments—transient indeed they were, for they now almost appeared to have been the phantoms of bewildered fancy. The subduing hand of misery has nearly erased the very shadows of my early hours; the bright delusions of youth's glowing day are sunk in cold oblivion, as the glorious sun sets in the border of the dark and troubled ocean! Filled with romantic inspiration, my mind was softened like the tempered wax, and ready to receive the tenderest impressions. In the vicinity of Avignon, beneath the shades of an embowering wood, devotion had long performed her sacred orisons at the monastery of St. Terese; the lofty walls were inaccessible, except on the fifteenth of June, when at the celebration of the fete de Dieu, the gates were thrown open, and every eye was permitted to view the solemn ceremony of the High Mass. Curiosity, more than zeal, led me to be a spectator: the holy sisters, arranged in the chapel of the convent, sung their choral anthems, replete with seraphic harmony; the vaulted arches repeated the thrilling sounds, while the fumes of heavenly incense curled around a thousand quivering tapers. Among the vestals, my every sense was fascinated by one, whose beauty far surpassed all I had yet conceived of mortal woman! A sweet melancholy gave inexpressible softness to features exquisitely regular, and the meek blush of unaffected modesty heightened a complexion beauteous and glowing as the rays of the morning. Her age pronounced her but newly initiated in holy duties, and her every look declared she was formed for that world from which she was secluded, in the deep and cheerless gloom of monastic apathy. I gazed upon her with a devotion more warm, and chaste, than even piety itself could have suggested. Her eye encountered mine—I fancied a thousand childish things;—my earnest attention seemed to perplex her; the crucifix fell from her trembling hand, she rose and left the chapel. I returned to Avignon.



The image of this peerless angel never forsook me; I beheld her in my midnight slumbers, her voice vibrated on my enraptured ear, and awoke me to all the agonies of dire despair. Often did I wander, when the sun sunk beneath the horizon, to catch its last beam that illumined the vanes of her lonely habitation. Often did I listen whole hours beneath the hated walls that enclosed the treasure of my soul, to catch the distant and imperfect sound of the holy evening song. I fancied I could distinguish her voice from every other, and my heart panted sadly responsive to every swelling note. I remained several months in this state of perfect wretchedness, when an accident opened to my distracted mind a gleam of transitory comfort. The Abbe de Versac, having embraced the most rigid state of holy bondage, was frequently employed in the pious office of confessor to the Nuns of St. Terese. A sudden indisposition preventing his usual attendance, I availed myself of the opportunity that presented itself, and, in the habit of a monk, bore to the Abbess of the convent a specious recommendation of myself, deputing me as worthy of sacred confidence. I was readily admitted into the cell of ghostly admonition, and fortune directed the heavenly Louisa to the footstool of contrition! The purity of her life scarcely left her a single error to acknowledge; my penance was gentle, as her soul was spotless: I requested her to peruse a lesson I had written, and to abide by the injunctions it contained; she thanked me, then, with the voice of meekness and humility, implored my benediction, and departed. My safety required that I should instantly withdraw from the sacred walls, lest the imposition should be detected, and at once destroy my reputation and my hopes. The transaction was soon made public, and I frequently heard eternal vengeance denounced against the perpetrator of so vile a fraud. The Abbess offered an immense reward for apprehending the sacrilegious hypocrite, every tongue united to condemn me. My letter informed her of my name, quality, and fortune; which, by my father's death, was not inconsiderable; I implored her compassion for my sufferings, and earnestly requested a decisive answer. I told her, in the language of despair, that nothing should induce me to survive her resentment, and concluded my frantic prayer by informing her, that I should watch for ten successive nights beneath the walls that immured her, to receive the fiat of my irrevocable destiny. At the twilight hour of the seventh day, when every breeze was hushed, and nature seemed to pause in melancholy silence, musing beneath the trees that encircled the prison of my idol, my ear was suddenly enchanted by the melody of a female voice. I drew near the spot from whence the sound proceeded, and distinctly heard the words of her complaint:

they pierced my heart, attuning every chord to sympathetic pity. From that moment I determined to release the beautiful Louisa, or perish beneath the flinty confine of her prison; the difficulties attending such an undertaking, and the dreadful punishments that would be inflicted on the perpetrators of such a crime, rendered every precaution necessary to ensure success. Chance, however, completed what years of indefatigable industry might not have accomplished: the Abbess of St. Terese was suddenly seized with an alarming indisposition, her life was supposed to be in extreme danger, and as the Lady Louisa was of the highest rank among the holy sisterhood, she was entrusted with the entire government of the convent, and unlimited possession of the rights of a superior. It was not difficult under these circumstances, to accomplish her wish; my letters were delivered without creating the smallest suspicion, and the rapturous hour was appointed for her escape from misery. Her heart was susceptible of the finest passions; she relied on my honour, and I never deceived her. She had long considered herself as a victim doomed to eternal solitude; the extraordinary change my propositions presented, the prospect of happiness that opened to her soul, gave energy to hope, and strength to resolution! I provided horses and a convenient disguise, Heaven smiled upon the deed, and gave to my fond arms the beautiful Louisa. We traversed the wood for some miles, and taking the route towards Marseilles, in three days reached that port in safety. There we were united in holy bands. The mistress of my affections became the wife of my bosom! and I became the proud possessor of a treasure worlds could not have purchased! Having procured a vessel, we set sail for Florence; the winds were propitious, we arrived unmolested at Leghorn, and from thence proceeded to the most beautiful city in the universe! My adored Louisa, whose early days had been devoted to religious duties, evinced not the smallest desire to relinquish the delights of retirement; her mind, accustomed to an uninterrupted scene of tranquillity, dreaded to engage in the tumultuous bustle of the busy world. We hired a beautiful little villa in the vicinity of Florence, and blest in the full possession of all that mutual affection and mental gratification could afford, looked down with pity on the proudest distinctions that any monarch could bestow! Three delicious years of perfect happiness cemented the bonds of undeviating attachment, when a ragatta, in celebration of the Pope's accession awoke the attention, and excited the curiosity of all ranks of people. My Louisa was tempted to partake of the amusement; and in the midst of delightful festivity, when every heart bounded with rapture, mine alone received the dreadful fiat of eternal anguish! The Arno was

beautifully serene; the silvery surface reflecting, as in a gently mirror, the verdant banks sloping to the margin, enamelled with flowers, and crowded with spectators. Thousands of little boats decorated with variegated streamers, were seen skimming along the lucid current: some containing the most dulcet harmony, and others shading with their silken awnings, the sparkling eyes and roseate blushes of enchanting beauty! My Louisa was charmed with this new and fascinating spectacle. Our *barchetta*, which was decorated with festoons of myrtle, was gently towed by youths, dressed in the habits of Arcadian shepherds. The mind, charmed to repose by the enchanting scene, sunk into that sweet indolence, which, like the slumber of wearied and exhausted nature, replenishes its faculties, and awakens its perfections to renovated lustre! My Louisa reclined her gentle form upon a mattress of yellow taffa; the warmth of the evening heightened the glow upon her cheek, and threw a delicious languor on her eyes, that rendered her the object of universal admiration! My heart was full of rapture, I beheld my precious treasure with more delight than language can describe. The universe had nothing to bestow, beyond what I possessed, and my enchanted senses could scarcely conceive any thing more divine, even in the regions of celestial happiness! We arrested our oars, to gratify the soul with the exquisite harmony proceeding from a magnificent barge moored near the margin of the river; when, on a sudden, a young man, of athletic form and noble mein, darted forward, and seizing my beloved Louisa, was bearing her in his arms to a boat that was along-side of us. Every nerve that quivered round my heart, throbbed at this unexpected outrage! the stranger committed his prize to the care of his companions, then advancing towards me, drew a stiletto from his sleeve, and aimed a stroke at my unguarded breast. I warded off the blow, and turned his dastard weapon on himself. The point entered his heart, he sunk breathless at my feet. Louisa opened her beauteous eyes to all the horrors of despair and death! She had only time to exclaim, "my brother!" when the life-blood rushing from her convulsive lip, she hid her icy cheek in my distracted bosom, and instantly expired. Frenzy now seizing on my tortured brain, suggested the foul crime of self-annihilation; but justice, like a pitying cherubim, snatched the dire weapon, reeking with kindred blood, from my assassin hand. I was torn from the lifeless victims of impatience, and thrown into the dungeons of horror and repentance. The Count de Clairville, the brother of my murdered angel, was the only relation relentless fate had left her; her name is now extinct, but her virtues are immortal! She had been compelled to take the veil from a base and little pride, which too frequently sacrifices the

younger female branches of illustrious, but indigent families, to a shameful and perpetual imprisonment. The unfortunate de Clairville was returning from his travels; destined to a military life, he had lately received a commission, and was hastening to join his regiment, then at Lyons. He had long given up the fruitless search after his adored sister. Fate brought her to his view, then closed his eyes for ever. The Count having given the first assault, my punishment was mitigated; my doom ten years imprisonment; and afterwards, perpetual banishment from a country, whose laws I had violated, and whose annals I had stained with blood. The former part of my sentence expired in days of weeping, and in nights of anguish, till the excess of grief produced a sullen stupor, that rendered me insensible to every calamity. Time gave again to my sad eyes the cheerful light of Heaven, and with it, all the pangs of fatal recollection! Driven from society, an alien to my native country; an outcast from every hope of future happiness; alone, unfriended, lost, forgotten; I knew not whither to direct my course, one half of my little fortune was forfeited to the state, and meagre poverty stretched forth her icy fangs to seal my destiny. By perseverance through a long and painful journey, I arrived in Spain, a wanderer, and unknown, labouring under all the agonies of conscious misery. I have from that hour resided among the mountains in the vicinity of Madrid. My hovel was too obscure to excite curiosity, and its solitary tenant too poor to dread interruption. Poverty and sorrow are the strongest securities against the intrusions of mankind; let *adversity* guard your threshold, and you may enjoy an uninterrupted life of mournful seclusion. Yet I do not presume to repine, for alas! every hour convinces me that prayers and tears are not sufficient to expiate my crimes. The penance I have imposed upon myself, is a pilgrimage to Loretto, and the first instance I experience of divine benignity, is the benevolent hospitality I now enjoy in the forest of Vancenza."

The Pilgrim, rising from his wicker chair, bowed respectfully to his lovely auditors. Elvira gave his sorrows a tributary tear; it fell upon his hand that rested on his staff as she stood near him; he pressed it to his lips; it revived his mournful heart; for it was the holy tear of commiserating virtue!

Before the sun rose from its eastern canopy, the Pilgrim resumed his toilsome journey of penitence and sorrow.

Several weeks passed slowly away, when the soft perfumes of returning spring, impregnated the atmosphere with health, and called forth buds and flowers from earth's rich bosom.

Elvira, whose form was but the shadow of declining beauty, now sunk into a state of alarming melancholy. The amiable

graces of the Prince Almanza were pictured in her heart's core. The gentle sylph that hovers on the breath of love, often snatched a sigh, just parting from her lip, while the memory of the respected Vancenza claimed it as a tribute of grateful sensibility.

The fatal story, so exquisitely described on the window of the gallery; the extraordinary key, committed to her care with such awful solemnity; the mortifying idea of depending upon the bounty of the Marchioness, whose income was barely sufficient to support her own dignity; and the approaching hour, when she should be compelled to quit for ever the only home she had been accustomed to acknowledge, filled her heart with inconceivable regret. A thousand conflicting agonies obtruded themselves upon her feelings; the dread of emerging from her retirement, to encounter the sneers and insults of envious superiors, was over-ruled by the abhorrence her proud heart felt, when she considered herself as existing in a state of miserable *dependance*.

These thoughts determined Elvira, as soon as their right of inhabiting the castle expired, to seek by the most delicate and honourable means, for some employ that would enable her to enjoy the tranquil hour of blessed independence!

The castle, which was once the scene of eternal delight and instructive recreation, was now transformed into the gloomy cavern of perpetual mourning. All the old domestics were discharged, except the steward, one venerable man-servant, and the female attendants absolutely necessary for the business of the household.

The death of the Count Vancenza was felt and acknowledged as a general calamity; the cloud of sorrow hung over the whole forest; the village sports were now at an end; the castle gate, once thrown open by the hand of hospitality, now almost perpetually closed, gave the habitation the appearance of a monastery.

Several months elapsed in an unvarying round of pensive application. The prince Almanza, whose respect for Elvira had ripened into the most ardent affection, and who had essayed every probable means of administering consolation to an heart deeply and sensibly impressed with the image of his idolatry, determined to visit once more the delightful retreat, where he had received such distinguished marks of attention and esteem. With this impression he departed from Madrid.

It was evening when he arrived at the castle. He found the outward gate unbarred, the great court-yard was covered with long grass, and the Gothic hall unoccupied by its usual train of domestics. He proceeded through the long gallery; the setting sun cast a gloomy crimson light through the painted windows: the portraits of the family, for many gene-



rations, still decorated the damp walls, covered with faded tapestry. His footsteps echoed as he passed along; Elvira heard them as she entered from the terrace; her heart palpitated with apprehension, that some supernatural being occasioned the unusual sound; she listened, she opened the folding door at the top of the gallery, and gently advancing, perceived at the farthest end, by the dim light, the figure of a man. "Heaven defend me!" exclaimed Elvira. The Prince, at the sound of her voice, hastened towards her, and taking her trembling hand, conducted her to her study.

The Marchioness and Carline soon joined them. Their first enquiries were after the Duke del Vero. The Prince observed a sudden glow upon Elvira's cheek. He considered it as an ill omen, and a full confirmation of her attachment to his friend. The Marchioness smiled, and the conversation turned upon another topic.

Elvira and Carline retired to rest. The Prince was left alone with the Marchioness de Vallorie.

After a moment's pause, "I request you to believe, Madam, said the Prince, "the last idea that could enter my mind would be that of intruding upon the retirement of this amiable family. I came hither charmed with the delicious hope that I had penetration sufficient to discover the sentiments of Elvira's heart; but I find my vanity misled me. I esteem my friend the Duke del Vero, and should have rejoiced to have seen him united to so amiable a woman; had I conceived"—Here the Marchioness interrupted him; "You are not mistaken," replied she—"Elvira has given proofs of her admiration of the Duke, to deny her partiality for him; but I know the delicacy of her soul, and am convinced that she would rather suffer whole ages of anxiety, than betray a thought that might expose her to ridicule or contempt.

"I wish to be satisfied," rejoined the Prince; "and I shall confess an eternal obligation to you, Madam, if you will speak to Elvira upon the subject. I love the Duke as dearly as a brother; and I esteem the charming Elvira too much not to promote hers, whatever may be my feelings upon the occasion."

"I am well apprized," said the Marchioness, "of the libertine character of the Duke del Vero. Elvira is no stranger to it; but her heart will not suffer her to follow the dictates of reason, and I am fully convinced her whole happiness centers in the man, of all others, whom she ought to contemn. How?" replied Almanza, "by what means are you convinced of Elvira's passion for the Duke?"

"By every possible and probable means," said the Marchioness; "her melancholy, from the first day she ever beheld him; her regret at quitting the castle; her blushes

whenever chance threw him in her way during her residence at Madrid; her cold indifference of the distinctions you publicly bestowed upon her; and her declining health since she has been deprived of his society."

"You are perfectly right, Madam," said Almanza, "but are you satisfied respecting the Duke's intentions towards Elvira?"—"That he loves her, resumed the Marchioness, "is beyond a single doubt; the peasants in the villages wherever we stopped, were speaking of nothing but the Duke del Vero's passion for the orphan of Vancenza.—Indeed she confessed to me, at Madame Montalba's assembly, that she was overpowered by his attentions."

Almanza was deeply afflicted by this intelligence; there remained not a doubt of its authenticity in his mind—and he was almost driven to despair.

"I will be fully convinced," said he, "I request a decisive answer as soon as possible;—my friend will be the happiest of mortals!—Elvira is the most amiable of women!"

"She is indeed an angel!" replied the Marchioness; "her perfections are inestimable; her heart is the throne of sensibility and virtue! the Duke will possess, indeed, a gem unequalled!"

"*Happy del Vero!*" exclaimed the Prince:

"Elvira will be delighted," said the Marchioness, "when she finds that her choice is sanctioned by you, as there is no person for whom she entertains a more perfect esteem."

Almanza could no longer support this mortifying conversation. He retired, in the most agonizing state of solicitude.

The Marchioness determined the next morning to make Elvira happy!

Early in the morning the Marchioness repaired to Elvira's apartment; she was just risen, having passed the night in the most painful reflections. "You look melancholy, my lovely friend," said the Marchioness, "but I have something to communicate that I know will give you pleasure. I have the Prince Almanza's orders to acquaint you with the motive of his visit."

"The Prince Almanza's orders, Madam!" replied Elvira,—"the motive of his visit!" She grew pale, and her voice faltered.

"Yes, my Elvira," rejoined the Marchioness, "he is acquainted with the state of your heart; and is charmed with the idea of accelerating your wishes."

"Madam, I have no wish that can interest the Prince Almanza," replied Elvira, "my vanity never will lead me into so gross an error. Whatever I may feel, I am certain no part of my conduct could authorize such a conjecture."

"Why are you so agitated?" said the Marchioness, "I know

your affections are engaged to one, who with gratitude returns your passion; why then suffer a childish and false delicacy to prevent your avowal of what so much interests you? The Prince Almanza intreats you to give him a decisive answer; politeness at least requires your immediate decision." "I request you will allow me a few hours to collect my spirits," said Elvira; I am indeed overpowered with the Prince's goodness. But the honour; the happiness; the distinction; is too much for me to support in my present state of anxiety." "Shall I give the Prince some reason to *hope*?" replied the Marchioness.

"The Prince has no reason to suppose his generosity will be ill bestowed," rejoined Elvira, with the most awkward timidity.

The Marchioness smiled, and withdrew; Elvira burst into tears of rapture!

The party assembled at breakfast. Elvira was overwhelmed with confusion; the Prince respectfully reserved; the Marchioness in high spirits; and Carline enjoying the general embarrassment.

As soon as the repast was finished, Elvira left the room, and repaired to the terrace. The Prince observed her from the window, and immediately followed her. "Have you any commands to Madrid, Madam?" said he, bowing with cold respect.

"I have no reason," replied Elvira, "to remember any person at Madrid with pleasure; and I believe there is no one *there* that would be flattered by *my* attentions." "Have you nothing to communicate to the Duke del Vero?" rejoined the Prince. Elvira, whose heart had prepared itself for a very different conversation, could scarcely refrain from tears; she endeavoured to conceal her mortification by a forced smile, and was quitting the terrace, when Almanza repeated his question. She could no longer disguise her emotion, and with a tone of firm resentment she replied, "It ill becomes the dignity or generosity of *your* character to insult or distress an unprotected woman; the laws of gallantry cannot authorise, and every honourable mind must shudder at such an outrage. If you hope to humble my vanity, you deceive yourself; for I have nothing to be proud of, except a reputation which even the Duke del Vero's slander cannot tarnish!" "I am sorry," said the Prince, "that you do not think me worthy of your confidence: the Duke, my friend, cannot be so blind to his own happiness, as to offend the woman he adores." "The Duke is my aversion," replied Elvira; "he knows it; and this is a mean contrivance to insult me. I am not surprised at any act of baseness *he* may be guilty of; but



I lament that the Prince Almanza should be the dupe of *such* a friend."

The arrival of the Marchioness put an end to their distressing conversation, and Elvira joyfully embraced the opportunity of retiring.

The Prince, unable to account for this extraordinary behaviour, resolved to depart immediately. He communicated his intentions to the Marchioness de Vallorie; who was equally astonished at the change in Elvira's sentiments.

"I came hither," said Almanza, to offer an heart filled with the most ardent enthusiasm for the virtues of your lovely Elvira! I now perceive that we have mistaken each other: yet I am unwilling to leave the castle with the distracting idea that my conduct has made an unfavourable impression on the mind of the most charming of women! I conjure you, madam, to obtain my pardon for the arrogance that led me to believe my proposals would not be rejected; tell her that Almanza will no more offend her; that his life would have been dedicated to her happiness, and his heart devoted to her service. If Elvira would allow me the honour of a few moments conversation, I think I could convince her of my respect for *her* character, and obliterate any false impression she may entertain of *mine*. Let me intreat you, madam, to procure me such an interview, and to witness the zeal I shall employ to deprecate her resentment."

"Elvira," replied the Marchioness, is "too liberal, and too well bred, to refuse you an opportunity of vindicating your conduct." She left the room; and, in a few moments returned, with Elvira.

"I request that you will make no apology," said Elvira, smiling with the graceful meekness of complacency; "we misunderstood each other; and I intreat that the conversation of this morning may be forgotten."

"Hear me, Elvira," said Almanza: I am your slave, and you have the power to command my silence; yet you are too generous to tyrannise over your captive; suffer him to wear your chains; but let them be *eternal*, and such as no earthly power can break asunder. Say you will be *mine*, beauteous Elvira, pronounce my destiny.

Elvira's agitation chained her tongue. She *looked* a thousand unutterable things. Her broken sigh was the signal of consent; and the soft smile of blushing rapture, evidently proclaimed the triumphs of her heart.

Almanza, whose delight was unbounded, knew not how sufficiently to evince his satisfaction; every profuse and liberal exertion of hospitality spread its enlivening transports through the forest; every cottage was converted into a little Elysium. The castle gates were thrown open to receive all

ranks of people, who chose to unite in celebrating the triumphs of virtue! The gentle Elvira, accompanied by her friends, visited every part of the forest, distributing bliss with the open hand of liberality. The Prince sent dispatches to Madrid with the joyful intelligence, his palace was the scene of splendid festivity, and every heart was bounding with impatience for the arrival of the lovely Princess!

The Marchioness, who had little inclination to visit Madrid, made it her earnest request that the marriage ceremony might be performed at Vancenza, "After which," said she, "I will retire with my daughter to Naples, and end my life in solitude and peace."

Elvira insisted that her young friend should remain with her; the Prince earnestly seconded her request, and the Marchioness consented. Every persuasive argument was employed to over-rule the Marchioness's resolution respecting herself but in vain.

The day of solemn contract was named, the interval, which was only one week, was barely sufficient to arrange the marriage settlements, and to prepare the palace at Madrid for the reception of the illustrious pair. The Prince departed. His last *adieu* was the bond of eternal fidelity, sealed with a kiss that *angels might have envied*!

Elvira, whose mind almost experienced a new creation, could scarcely support the unusual state of rapture so unexpectedly prepared for her.

Carline was doubly gratified by the event. The happiness of her friend, and the prospect of again entering into the gay world, by turns enraptured her fancy. She was all vivacity! all ecstasy! all expectation!

The young friends were employed every day in making splendid preparations.

The picture gallery was destined for the principal scene of festivity. Carline objected to its melancholy appearance, and insisted that the uncouth tapestry, and dumb assembly of warlike ancestors, and austere matrons whose hideous paraphernalia, and solemn frowns, would damp the pleasures of the day, should be removed to some obscure apartment.

Elvira smiled at her lively conceits, and having prevailed upon the Marchioness to consent, the next day was fixed upon for the demolition of the ancient adornments.

The ceremony of dislodging the gothic assembly was commenced with some degree of compunction on the part of Elvira. They had nearly removed one half of the grotesque society; when taking down a large frame, containing the portrait of a beautiful woman, Elvira's eye was instantly struck with the *pannel* it had concealed.

This extraordinary appearance of some secret repository, filled her heart with trembling agitation. She requested the servant to leave the gallery; and, securing the door, with prophetic timidity approached the *fatal pannel*.

For some moments she stood motionless and almost petrified with horror!

At length with slow and tottering steps, she advanced towards the wainscott; her hand, cold as monumental marble, presented the key, which the venerable Count had given to her in his last moments. Without the smallest difficulty she removed the brass plate, the wards found easy access, and the small door of the recess flew open with resistless violence! "Merciful Heaven," exclaimed Elvira, "what can this mean?"

She would have departed, but her feet were rivetted to the ground. The spot where she stood, was near the window, upon whose transparent tablet, the *well known* lines were written. She gazed upon them for some moments—they inspired her with courage. "Fate leads me on," exclaimed Elvira, in a low and solemn voice; "I will obey, even though I *perish*."

Within this hollow space, evidently contrived for the purpose, stood a small casket of massy gold, fastened with three broad badges of wax bearing the arms of Vancenza.

Elvira was still unable to move; her soul was chilled with fear, and she scarcely breathed, lest the sound of respiration should chase the wondrous vision from her view; for she could not believe the reality of what she beheld! The Marchioness awoke her from her reverie, by knocking at the folding doors:

She flew to give her admittance, and led her to the mysterious casket, trembling and astonished! "What can this casket contain?" said the Marchioness. "Heaven only knows," replied Elvira; "I dare not venture to remove it; yet, what have I to dread? I have never injured any human being; but my heart grows cold within my bosom, at the idea of something *extraordinary*! The Marchioness, with extreme caution, at length released the casket from its prison. Elvira, whose eager eye never, even for an instant, lost sight of the precious treasure, accompanied her to her chamber. Carline was immediately apprised of the circumstance, and they prepared for the awful ceremony of inspecting its contents.

The Marchioness, with fear and trembling, having broken the seals that were placed on the front, proceeded to lift up the cover. Thus far having accomplished the task of dreadful inquiry they discovered a small crimson-velvet case fastened with clasps of gold. Upon opening it, they found it contained several large sheets of paper closely covered with

ines, evidently written by a female hand. Elvira, gently pressing the Marchioness's arm, in a tremulous tone, entreated her to *forbear* for a moment. She obeyed the injunction; for she observed Elvira's cheek blanched with the icy touch of secret horror.

They gazed on each other with silent attention. Elvira, bending her eyes towards the papers which lay on the table, exclaimed, "Gracious God! I have seen these characters before!" The sad complaint inscribed upon the gallery window, was imprinted on her brain; the exact similarity chilled her almost to instant annihilation!

The Marchioness soothingly enquired whether or not she should proceed?

Elvira bowed consent—they drew their chairs round the table—the manuscript was unfolded, and the last page presented the signature of "Madeline Vancenza."

"Alas!" said the Marchioness, "it is the writing of my amiable sister! Shall I read the contents? My lovely Elvira, your exquisitely feeling heart has deceived you; it is nothing more than some family record; have you any curiosity to hear it read?"

Elvira having considerably recovered her spirits, expressed her acquiescence by a gentle smile:

The first page contained nothing more than a short address to whomsoever should discover the secret pannel. The second was scarcely legible, being blotted by the marks of many drops of water; probably the tears of the unfortunate writer. The following pages were, with some difficulty, decyphered.

"When the hand that writes, and the heart that dictates these lines, are freezing on the dreary pallet of the grave; when the faint traces of my sorrows shall fade before the obliterating wing of time; perchance some kindred eye may drop the last commiserating tear, and wash out the remembrance of my woes for ever. Yet, ere my name is consigned to end less oblivion; ere I relinquish the dear solitudes, the extender name of mother, I call to aid the feeble powers of an hausted frame, and dedicate my last moments to this task of sorrow. If this fatal record should be discovered during the life of the Count Vancenza, to him I bequeath it.—If he should have quitted this transitory state, to meet his unfortunate sister in the abodes of bliss, I request that the Marchioness de Vallorie will preserve it, as the last legacy of her affectionate Madeline."

The Marchioness, raising her eyes towards Heaven, suffused with tears, pressed the paper to her lips and proceeded. "To the generosity of my brother I am indebted for an asylum, when the insolence of unfeeling pride, and the taunts of rigid propriety, would have sullied the honour, and stamped indeliable

disgrace upon the name of my illustrious ancestors. When I came to the castle of Vancenza, I was the credulous victim of an illicit passion, the effects of which soon became visible to the observing eye of the Count, my brother; but the dread of exposure, and his unbounded affection for me, induced him to conceal my disgrace, and to promise eternal protection to my then unborn, Elvira!"

The Marchioness ventured to meet Elvira's eyes; her countenance bespoke the agitation of her soul; she sighed as if her heart would break. Carlina took her hand, and pressed it tenderly; it was *convulsed and cold*.

The Marchioness proceeded—"Justice to myself and to my child, whose innocent eyes are now exploring the secret avenues to my heart, obliges me to avow, in the most solemn manner, the fatal cause of her existence, and my eternal anguish.

"During the absence of the Count, my brother, who was employed in the service of his country at the siege of Grenada; it is well known at Madrid, that I was left under the protection of the late Princess Almanza: she was a woman of infinite accomplishments, and most exemplary piety. My young mind received an edifying lesson from the purity of her life, and the example failed not to inspire me with a just veneration for the innumerable virtues of my amiable patroness. My eldest sister, now Marchioness de Vaoire, was particularly attached to a life of religious retirement; she resided in a convent at Naples. I had no other female relation, and my only intercourse with her was by epistolary correspondence! I had attained my nineteenth year, when the Princess died, leaving an only son the darling of her heart, to console her afflicted husband, under the severest calamity, to which human nature is liable. During many months I was his only associate; my conversation his solace; my accomplishments, his delight! Time wore away the memory of his Princess, and increased his *fatal* attachment to me. The Prince was in his thirty-second year; captivating in person, and amiable in manners. His addresses were honourable; and his passion not displeasing to me. I felt a strong prepossession in his favour. His exemplary kindness towards his former Princess; his affectionate attention to his son, who was then only six years old; his acknowledged character for benevolence and generosity, added to the most brilliant talents, cultivated by all the graces of education, were powerful advocates in his favour. My heart was a stranger to deceit; and I considered the Prince as my friend, and my protector: he availed himself of those confidential titles to cover the blackest purposes: and under the mask of friendship obtained my esteem; esteem ripened into affection: He marked

the weakness of my soul, and triumphed over that *honour* he was bound to protect, by all the laws of truth and hospitality."

An involuntary groan burst from the heart of Elvira, as she clasped her trembling hands in the agony of affection.

"Sweet Elvira," said Carline, "be comforted: Elvira rested her head upon the shoulder of her friend; and the Marchioness continued the dreadful history.

"In vain did I remonstrate with the destroyer of my peace, dreading my brother's vengeance, and convinced that he would never pardon the affront offered to his family; my timid bosom tamely consented to conceal its anguish, and patiently endure the miseries of despair. The awful moment of my brother's return, now approached. My heart dreaded to meet him, though every vein panted for his protection. He arrived; and his *first* embrace was bestowed upon the betrayer of his *sister*! "I return," said he, "from the perils of the field, to thank my Prince for the care with which he has preserved the most valuable treasure I possess. To-morrow, my Madeline, we will depart for the castle, where you shall preside the mistress of my fortune, the honour of my family." We departed. The Prince Almanza, with the poisoned tongue of deep dissimulation, bade me, Farewell! At the expiration of a few short weeks, my last state of dreadful humiliation became visible to the fond eyes of my afflicted brother; I *then* confessed a crime, which it was no longer in my *power* to conceal. I embraced his knees, and, in the anguish of my soul, implored him to seek an asylum for me until the tremendous hour was past, when even the most criminal demand the sigh of pity; and I promised that the remainder of my days should be dedicated to penitence and humility. My brother raised me from the earth, and he pressed me to his bosom. He provided a place of retirement for me, at a small house in the neighbourhood of Madrid, where I passed for the widow of an officer. My Elvira, as soon as she was born, was conveyed to the castle by an old female, who was a stranger to my name and family. I told her, that the Count Vancenza had been the dearest friend of my lost husband, and, in remembrance of his virtues, he had promised to provide for his unfortunate offspring. My little cherubim was considered by the domestics as a fatherless dependant on the bounty of their Lord; and as soon as my strength permitted, I returned to Vancenza, where I now write this painful history of my unequalled and hopeless sorrow. I shall deliver the key of this sacred deposit to my brother, in trust for my Elvira; though he is a stranger to the meaning of the gift. I feel that I am journeying fast towards that home, where alone I can expect to find repose and consolation! If this manuscript should ever reach the hands of my beloved child, let her not



lament, that the *last* pang wrung from my withered heart has expiated its errors ! Her delicacy will have nothing to apprehend from the destroyer of her mother, for he no longer *exists* to discover her origin. \* \* \* \* \*

From the date of the manuscript, it appeared to have been written only three weeks before the Marchioness, who was then at Naples, received the dreadful intelligence of her sister's death. When she arrived at Vancenza, the little Elvira was then nearly two years old, and her unfortunate mother had then been dead some months, any recollection of having seen her, was therefore impossible. By the time the Marchioness had concluded the fatal manuscript, the glimpse of day faintly shone through the casement of her chamber. "Let us retire to rest," said the Marchioness, "and when we rise, we will consider what is to be done upon this painful subject." Elvira sighed deeply. Her fixed eye had no longer a single tear to quench the burning anguish of her brain ; her trembling knees could scarcely support her languid form ; she pressed the hands of her dear relatives ; and left the chamber without uttering a syllable, and passed through the great hall, bedecked with all the splendid preparations of nuptial celebration ; her heart shuddered at the sight. She fainted and was conveyed to her bed by two female servants ; who with the Marchioness, attended by her daughter, sat by her side in the most dreadful state of affliction. She remained the whole day totally insensible ; uttering incoherent sentences, and execrating the name of Almanza ! In the evening, Carline, who never quitted Elvira's chamber, approaching the window, opened the curtains, and in a few minutes she discovered two horsemen in the Prince's livery advancing along the avenue. They seemed to fly upon the wings of joy ! their eager haste proclaimed them the harbingers of bliss ! But, alas ! the dawn of happiness was overcast with darkness, and the keen blast of dire distraction had withered all the buds of social comfort. The Marchioness descended to the great hall, where, with an aching heart, she waited to receive the promised bridegroom. The gates were open ; he entered, with an air of conscious triumph ! He ran towards the Marchioness, and falling on his knee, "I am come," said he, to claim my precious treasure ; my bride : my darling ; my Elvira !" "Amiable Almanza," replied the Marchioness, "I fear Elvira *never* can be yours : a sudden fever has attacked her precious senses ; she lies upon the bed of sickness ; there are no hopes of her recovery." The Prince shrunk like a blasted flower that meets the fervid lightning ! He conjured the Marchioness by all the miseries he felt, by all the virtue of Elvira, by every vow of plighted faith between them, to lead him to her. "I *must*, I *will* behold her," said

the Prince. He was conducted to the melancholy chamber. Carline met him at the door; she shook her head; and whispered, "*All will soon be over!*" He approached the bed; the curtains were undrawn; she lay as if in a profound sleep; her cheeks were white, and cold as Alpine snow; her dark eyebrows, shading the fading orbs beneath, were agitated by quick convulsive motions; her breath was short and laboured; her hand was feverish; she was totally insensible. The Prince listened as she breathed; a chrystal drop stole down her cheek; he kissed it off; she murmured, "abhorred Almanza!" He seized her burning hand; she drew it hastily away, and exclaimed with a deep sigh, *I Cannot wed my brother!*" The Prince imagined these expressions were merely the effects of her delirium; and he addressed her in the tenderest accents. At the sound of his voice she started up, and looking at him with a momentary horror, she hid her face upon her pillow. The Marchioness beckoned the Prince, and intreated him to withdraw, judging it most prudent that he should leave Elvira, at least for that evening. He obeyed. The Marchioness retired to her chamber, almost fainting with fatigue: Elvira seemed more composed; and, in a low voice, bade her good night! Carline and an old female servant, sat by the side of the bed. The clock struck three; Elvira counted the strokes; for the last time! A small lamp stood upon the table; its glimmering rays just cast a feeble light through the opening of the curtains. All was silent for some minutes. Elvira groaned deeply. "Hark!" said she, "I hear the sound of ten thousand harps, they are borne by troops of angles! See! they throng about a glittering vision! It is my mother, she beckons me to her embrace; I come." She made an effort to rise; her strength failed! she sunk into the arms of death! So drooped, so withered, the Rose of Vancenza!! Carline's shrieks awoke the Marchioness; all was frenzy and despair! The apartments were stripped of their gaudy trappings; the great hall was hung with black, to receive the remains of Elvira. At the end of eight days the last sad obsequies were performed in the church of Saint Isidro; the corpse of the once beautiful Elvira was deposited to mingle its ashes with those of the lamented Vancenza! Almanza attended as chief mourner! The disconsolate Marchioness, shortly after retired to Italy, and dedicated the remainder of her days to solitude and resignation. Carline, at the death of her mother, which happened about ten years after, embraced a state of celibacy, in a convent of grey sisters at Naples. The unfortunate and virtuous Almanza, who was never acquainted with the cause of that dreadful catastrophe, after passing a year of total seclusion, devoted the rest of his life to the duties of a soldier.